

Happenings

*at the Science Advisory Board
...insuring a solid technical basis for environmental protection*

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1. EDITORIAL

SEEKING NEW WINESKINS FOR NEW WINE

Over the past few years, the Agency has been making some significant additions to its line of traditional products for protecting public health and the environment. Specifically, in addition to the "old wine" of criteria, standards, and regulations, the Agency has introduced a number of innovative approaches. This new wine comes bottled under several labels; e.g., sector-based environmental protection, regulatory

negotiation, and place-based environmental protection. Some veteran Agency-watchers have likened this change as a shift from "Old Thunder-bolt" to "Reg Lite".

The Science Advisory Board (SAB) has sampled and savored some of this new wine, finding it to be promisingly more full-bodied than earlier vintages, with a refreshingly innovative bouquet. In fact, some of these same attributes will be found in the Board's own Integrated Risk Project that has been brewing for some time and will be released for peer review this summer.

At the same time, the Board was puzzled about how its traditional containers (e.g., Reviews and Advisories -- old wineskins, if you will) can accommodate these new Agency products. For example, some have argued that an after-the-fact SAB Review of the science underlying an already-agreed-upon Reg Neg holds greater promise of souring the wine than it does of improving it.

During the April meeting of its Executive Committee, the SAB heard presentations from Agency personnel about five different innovative approaches -- out of a list of more than 50 on the EPA Website -- being pursued today. These included such topics as Common Sense Initiative, National Environmental Protection Partnerships, and Sustainable Industries.

The Board found this all to be rather heady stuff. One member said it was both the most exciting and the most frustrating presentation that he had ever heard at an SAB meeting. It was exciting because of the innovations and bold thinking reflected in the new approaches, and it was the most frustrating because of the lack of detail -- particularly as it related to the role and input of science -- in the presentations.

Therefore, the SAB Executive Committee has appointed a Planning Committee to explore hosting/catalyzing a workshop early next calendar year to examine where/when/how science can best encourage and improve these new approaches. Over the next several months HAPPENINGS will be a vehicle for sharing details of the workshop as they emerge. We would also be happy to hear from readers about their own views on the role of and mechanisms for scientific input in the Agency's new approaches.

In short, we are seeking new wineskins for new wine.

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